

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRES LOPEZ MAKES SPIRITED DEFENSE OF HIS GOVT

REF BOGOTA 3616

1. AS HE PROMISED APR 17 (REFTEL) PRES LOPEZ INITIATED HIS CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND HIS GOVT AND COLOMBIA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN TWO PUBLIC APPEARANCES APR 21 AND 22. IN BARRANQUILLA APR 21 THE PRES DEFENDED HIS ADMIN'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY REVIVING SLOGANS FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY LIBERAL MOVEMENT (MRL), THE LIBERAL PARTY FACTION HE FOUNDED IN THE LATE FIFTIES, OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND HOUSING FOR ALL COLOMBIANS. CITING IMPRESSIVE FIGURES IN EACH OF THESE AREAS FOR THE PEOPLE OF BARRANQUILLA (INCLUDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF 1,713 LOW COST HOUSES IN A SUBURB OF THE CITY BETWEEN AUG 9 74 AND APR 20 75 LOPEZ SAID THE TEST WAS WHETHER "WE ARE ABLE TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS FACING COLOMBIA THROUGH A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, OR IF WE HAVE TO RECUR TO THE ALTERNATIVES OF TOTALITARIANISM OR DESPOTISM."

2. LOPEZ LAUDED THE POLICE IN PUERTO RICO, CAQUETA FOR HEROICALLY RESISTING THE ASSAULT THERE (BOGOTA 3340) BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC) WHICH

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HE SAID "IS AN EXAMPLE FOR US TO USE IN TELLING THE EXTREMISTS

AND TOTALITARIANS THAT THEY WILL NOT SUCCEED."

3. SUFFERING FROM LARYNGITIS, BROUGHT ON BY HIS EXUBERANCE IN BARRANQUILLA PRES LOPEZ BRIEFLY ADDRESSED A LARGE CROWD APR 22 ASSEMBLED IN BOGOTA IN A "SPONTANEOUS" DEMONSTRATION ORGANIZED BY LIBERAL VOLUNTEERS TO HONOR THE PRES'S ELECTION VICTORY ONE YEAR PREVIOUSLY. HE SAID THAT HE HAD USED HIS OVERWHELMING ELECTION VICTORY TO OPEN COLOMBIA TO ALL POLIT VIEWPOINTS, "TO GIVE ALL COLOMBIANS A PLACE IN THE SUN, A PLACE THEY HAVE NOT ENJOYED DURING THE LAST 16 YEARS." HE REFERRED TO THE LIBERAL PARTY IN COALITION WITH THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AS "REPRESENTING IN THE GOVT THE DEMOCRATIC STABILITY OF COLOMBIA."

4. FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT, LABMIN MARIA ELENA DE CROVO ADDRESSED THE CROWD, STATED THAT THE LOPEZ ADMIN HAD FULFILLED ITS ELECTION PROMISES, WHICH SHE SAID NEVER INCLUDED A PROMISE OF "RIVERS OF MILK AND HONEY, BUT RATHER THE DIFFICULT TASK OF REBUILDING VIGOROUSLY AND TOTALLY, COLOMBIAN DEMOCRACY, THROUGH HARD WORK AND SACRIFICE." FINALLY, FORNMIN INDALECIO LIEVANO TOLD THE CROWD THAT THE LOPEZ ADMIN FACED TWO DANGERS: "ON THE ONE SIDE ARE THOSE DAMAGED BY THE REFORMS WHO CONSPIRE TOPROVOKE LACK OF CONFIDENCE (IN THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC), AND ON THEOTHER IS THE EXTREME LEFT WITH A TOTALITARIAN CONCEPTFOR WHOM THE PROBLEM OF DISCONTENT AMONG THE MASSES HAS NEVER MEANT MUCH SINCE THEY REPRESS WHATEVER DISCONTENT MIGHT APPEAR." HE CONTRASTED THESE CURRENTS OF THOUGHT WITH THOSE OF THE LOPEZ ADMIN, CLAIMING THAT "THE PRES HAS RESPECTED THE FREEDOM OF ALL COLOMBIANS, NOT OUT OF WEAKNESS, BUT BECAUSE HE HAS WANTED COLOMBIAN SOCIETY TO CHANGE WITH A MINIMUM OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, CHALLENGING THE LIBERAL MASSES AND THE CONSERVATIVES (WHO SUPPORT THE GOVT) TO PUBLICLY DEFEND IT." HE CITED THE EXAMPLES OF COLOMBIA'S RENEWAL OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA AND NEGOTIATIONS OF COLOMBIAN CANAL RIGHTS WITH PANAMA AS REFLECTING THE WORK OF A DEMOCRATIC AND OPEN SOCIETY.

5. COMMENT: PRES LOPEZ' DECISION TO LAUNCH A PUBLIC DEFENSE OF HIS ADMIN AND THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS OF COLOMBIA APPARENTLY STEMS FROM HIS CONCERN THAT RECENT OUTBREAKS OF CRIMINAL AND GUERRILLA VIOLENCE MIGHT GET OUT OF HAND, FORCING HIM TOO IMPOSE A STATE OF SIEGE. HE WOULD VIEW THIS STEP AS A SETBACK FOR HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"CENTER-LEFT" REGIME WHICH, AS HE AND HIS MINISTERS INDICATED IN THEIR SPEECHES, COUNTS AMONG ITS ACHIEVEMENTS, THE OPENING OF COLOMBIAN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE TO ALL POINTS OF VIEW. FURTHER PUBLIC APPEARANCES BY THE PRES IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE THIS THEME. VAKY

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